

CLASSIC STORIES  
OF  
CHINA

# Folk Customs Stories

Compiled by Bi Yanli



CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

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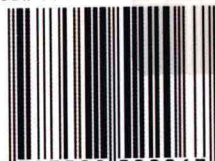
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# Preface

As the old Chinese saying goes: “Ask about the customs and taboos in any strange place you’re going to visit in order to avoid trouble.” This is sound advice. At present, more and more foreigners are coming to China, and having frequent dealings with Chinese people. In this context, in order to really understand Chinese culture, foreigners need to learn about Chinese customs and habits first.





Folk customs originate and are inherited from civil society, and are passed on from generation to generation. China has a long history and vast territory and has a whole host of customs. The folk customs collected in this book are well known in most Chinese areas inhabited by the Han people, and contain four parts: festivals and holidays, etiquette and rituals, basic necessities of life, and folk worship and taboos.

Because of limitations of space, we cannot list all folk customs. But it is sufficient to offer a comprehensive understanding of Chinese folk customs. We sincerely hope readers can enjoy these colorful old Chinese folk stories. If you come to China to work or travel in the future, maybe you will pay more attention to Chinese customs, and show a better understanding of Chinese folk culture.



After reading this book, maybe you will get a comprehensive grasp of Chinese local lives more quickly, and be able to deal with Chinese people more easily.





# CONTENTS

The Agricultural Calendar and the 24 Solar Terms	11
Laba Festival	19
Spring Festival (I)	25
Spring Festival (II)	31
Lantern Festival	38



Pure Brightness Festival	46
Dragon Boat Festival	53
Double Seventh Festival	60
Mid-Autumn Festival	67
Double Ninth Festival	74
12 Chinese Zodiac Signs	81
Modest and Tasteful Zhongshan Suit	90
No Food Is Better Than Jiaozi	96
Beancurd - Make the Best of Mistake	104
“Mendang Hudui”: Interesting Words and Expressions	110



Full Month Party and Grabbing Test	117
Birthday Celebration and Longevity Celebration	123
Red Veil	131
Double Happiness	138
Burning Paper Money	144
Implications of Colors	150
Connotation of Numbers	157
Gods of Blessing, Prosperity, Longevity, Happiness and Wealth	171
Mascots	181



# The Agricultural Calendar and the 24 Solar Terms



The agricultural calendar is the traditional Chinese way of calculating the passage of the days, also known as Xia or lunar calendar. The name “Xia” comes from the fact this calendar has been used since the Xia Dynasty (2070 BC-1600 BC); at the same time it is a “lunar calendar”, because it is associated with the cycles of the Moon and people in ancient times treated its waxing and waning as a single month. The calendar is used to guide the annual arrangement of agriculture and has always been popular among farmers.



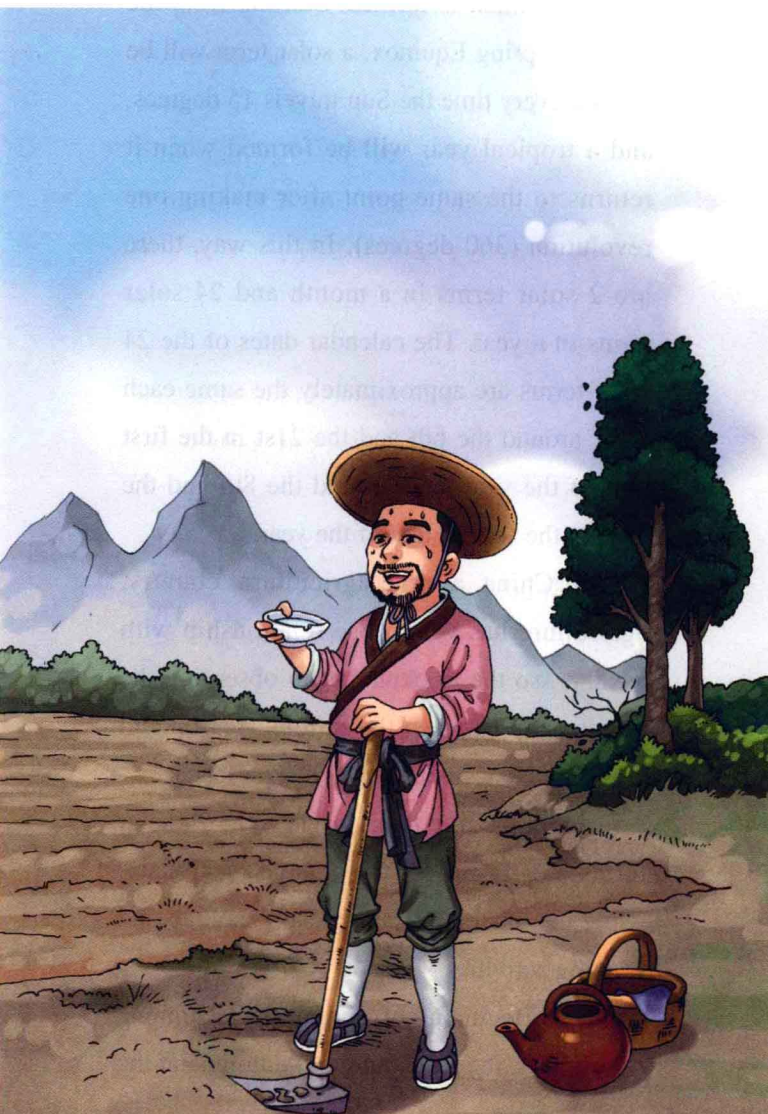
In the traditional Chinese calendar, there are 24 solar terms, which are the Beginning of Spring, Rain Water, Waking of Insects, Spring Equinox, Pure Brightness, Grain Rain, Beginning of Summer, Grain Full, Grain in Ear, Summer Solstice, the Slight Heat, the Great Heat, the Beginning of Autumn, the Limit of Heat, the White Dew, the Autumnal Equinox, the Cold Dew, the Frost's Descent, the Beginning of Winter, the Small Snow, the Great Snow, the Winter Solstice, the Slight Cold, and the Great Cold. To certain extent, the 24 solar terms objectively reflect the changes in temperature throughout the year, rainfall, phenomenology, and so on, so it was an important tool for the people of ancient times in organizing farming activities.

The 24 solar terms are divided based on the positions of the Sun as it travels along the ecliptic longitude (e.g. the orbit in which the Earth revolves around the Sun). When the Sun lies at zero degree of celestial longitude, where its direct rays shine on the equator, the



# 农历与二十四节气

The Agricultural Calendar and the 24 Solar Terms



Spring Equinox is formed. Starting from the point of Spring Equinox, a solar term will be formed every time the Sun travels 15 degrees, and a tropical year will be formed when it returns to the same point after making one revolution (360 degrees). In this way, there are 2 solar terms in a month and 24 solar terms in a year. The calendar dates of the 24 solar terms are approximately the same each year: around the 6th and the 21st in the first half of the year, and around the 8th and the 23rd in the second half of the year.

In China, a large agricultural country, agriculture has very close relationship with weather, so the ancients began observing the relationship between the farming season and climate, and accumulated rich experience.

From the title point of view, the 24 solar terms mostly reflect the change of climate, while the others indicate phenomenology and farming activities.

The Beginning of Spring, the Beginning of Summer, the Beginning of Autumn and the





Beginning of Winter respectively indicate the beginning of the four seasons.

The Spring Equinox and the Autumnal Equinox mean the time of equal length between day and night, reflecting the change of the Sun's path. On the day of the Spring Equinox, the direct rays of the sun shine on the northern part, so that the northern hemisphere begins to have longer days and shorter nights. On the day of the Autumnal Equinox, the direct rays of the sun shine on the southern part, so that the northern hemisphere begins to have shorter days and longer nights.

The Summer Solstice and Winter Solstice mark the seasonal apex. On the day of the Summer Solstice, the northern hemisphere has the longest day - called "Ribeizhi" by the ancients - meaning the day when the sun travels to its northernmost point. After the Summer Solstice, as the sun gradually moves south, the northern hemisphere has shorter and shorter days and longer and longer nights. On



the day of the Winter Solstice, the northern hemisphere has the longest night - known as “Rinanzhi” by the ancients - meaning the day when the sun reaches its southernmost point. After the Winter Solstice, the direct rays of the sun again gradually shine on the northern hemisphere so that the days there gradually grow longer.

The Slight Heat, the Great Heat, the Limit of Heat, the Slight Cold and the Great Cold reflect the change of temperature. “Heat” means burning hot. The Slight Heat means it is very hot, but not yet the hottest, which, of course, is the Great Heat; the Limit of Heat marks the end of the hot summer, and the onset of cooler weather. The Slight Cold means it is becoming cold, but not at the intensity of the Great Cold that follows.

The Rain Water, the Grain Rain, the Small Snow and the Great Snow reflect the phenomenon of precipitation. The Rain Water means the beginning of precipitation; the Grain Rain means the arrival of sufficient

